

Madison ski team rises to occasion

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Feature writer

As a boy growing up on the shore of Lake Monona, Brad Moore ached to have a boat, to race across the water on skis, cutting back and forth across the wake, sending up rooster-tails of spray that turned to rainbows in the sunshine.

But he couldn't talk his parents into buying a boat, so he did the next best thing: He joined the Capital City Ski Team. He paid his dues, and they taught him how to ski.

That was 16 years ago, when Moore was 12 and the ski team was just 2 years old. Today, Moore is president of the 60-member team, which will stage a gala "Old Timers' Show" Sunday evening at Law Park. The show will begin at 7 p.m. and last until dark. As usual, admission is free but donations will be accepted.

"When you consider that our Sunday evening show regularly gets 2,500 people, it's amazing to me how few people know anything about the team," Moore said, "especially when you think how long we've been around."

Come long way

And how famous the amateur team has become in national water skiing circles. Since 1970, when the Capital City skiers won their first state championship, the team has captured more national and individual show skiing titles than any other team in the country.

The Capital City skiers were the national champs from 1975 through '78, finishing second in '79, but regaining the title in 1980. National awards also went to the team's announcer, boat drivers and dock crews. In 1978, the Capital City skiers became the only team in the country to be honored by the American Water Ski Association for "an outstanding contribution to the advancement of show skiing in the U.S."

Of the more than 300 Madison area skiers who have belonged to the team in the last 18 years, more than 30 went on to become professional skiers with the top shows in the U.S., including Tommy Bartlett's Ski, Sky and Stage Show in Wisconsin Dells and Gatlinburg, Tenn., and Cypress Gardens and Sea World in Florida.

And one of the things that hardly anyone seems to know about the team is that anyone can join. "We've

taught 10-year-olds and 55-year-olds," said Moore. "It's just not that difficult to learn."

Although most of the active skiers in the club range in age from 12 to 35, other members work on the dock crew, as announcers, as boat drivers or helping with costumes.

Location caused friction

The team presents shows on Thursday and Sunday nights at Law Park on Lake Monona, a location that has caused some friction in the past between city officials and ski team members. The primary drawbacks are shortages of both parking and seating, Moore said.

"Our ideal location would be Warner Park," he added. "We've skied there on special occasions, like the Fourth of July, but can't seem to get any kind of permanent arrangement worked out."

"But really," he said, "if you look at any of the other water ski teams that compete nationally and do as well as we do, at least they have nice sandy beaches to work from."

Among the "stars" — all currently performing with professional water ski shows — coming back for Sunday's show are Laurie and Keith Dehnart; Kerry, Grant, Mike and Cathy Tolzman; Jenny Simon; Joey Lincicum; Jim Pharo and Larry Endres.

Moore himself had offers to turn pro, and occasionally will ski for a week in the Dells. "But professional water skiing is just now getting to the point of paying any real money," he said, "and I just couldn't afford the lifestyle."

First jump recalled

Instead, he earned an undergraduate and graduate degree in business from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and is currently a product manager for the Oscar Mayer Co. His job entails a lot of product testing — which means eating — "so I have to continue skiing," he said with a laugh.

He still remembers the first time he took a ski jump, back in 1968. "I was definitely scared, and of course, I fell really hard, so then I wouldn't try it again for at least two months."

Today, he added, although he also skis barefoot and in doubles, jumping is his favorite stunt. "It's the freedom of being in the air. It's no longer what you would call scary, but it's still thrilling. It's still a rush."